LOADING AND FIRING INSTRUCTIONS
FOR THE

ROBERT E. LEE
COMMEMORATIVE
PISTOL

by Merrill Lindsay

Chairman, Antique Arms Committee
United States Historical Society

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It is not surprising that General Robert E. Lee carried a sidearm made in Yankee territory. The Colt 36 caliber percussion revolver was the favorite weapon of officers on both sides of the "War between the States". After the war started, however, only a lucky few in the South owned Colts. The popularity of the 36 caliber Navy Colt is attested to by the people who used it and the number of years that it was made.* It was manufactured well into the cartridge period. Production stopped in 1873, sixteen years after the first cartridge revolvers were made and successfully marketed in the United States. It is designated as the "Navy" because there is a mythical battle scene of a naval engagement between nonexistent Mexican and Texas navies, splendid square riggers in a combat worthy of Nelson at Trafalgar engraved on the cylinder. Actually the different models of the Dragoon, modelled after the original Whitneyville Colt were so heavy that it took a strong man to lift one. Normal use demanded a revolver that could be man-handled, not hoisted, and the 36 Navy became Colt's most popular gun. It went West with the settlers and the 1849 Gold Bugs. It rode in saddle holsters with cowboys, rustlers and the Dodge City gang. The Colt Navy also led a more distinguished career as an officer's weapon in the United States Army. It was a weapon of first choice both in the North and South during the Civil War. When the South could not hope for Colts from Hartford, they made them in Augusta and Macon, Georgia. Lee's Colt came from Hartford.

*Nathan L. Swayzz. *51 Colt Navies*

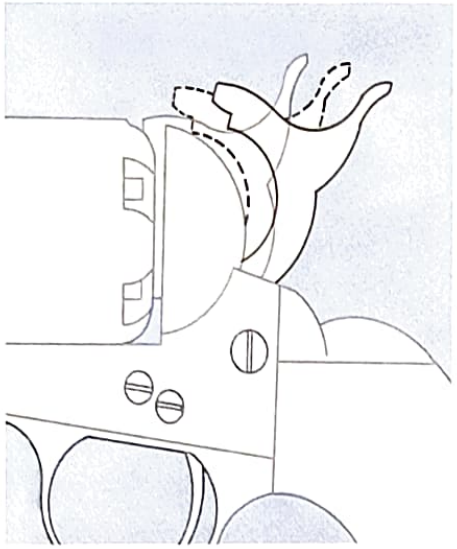
The 1851 Colt Navy percussion revolver is one of the sweetest shooting and most accurate of all revolvers, black powder, cartridge, antique or modern. I am a very mediocre shot but at normal pistol range, twenty to twenty five yards, I can hit a lemon juice can swinging at the end of a string three out of five times. This is as good shooting as I can do with a modern target automatic.

There is a trick, however. Don't overload the chambers of the cylinder. For target shooting 16 grains (three fifths of a dram if you have an old measure) is just right if you are shooting a round ball. A heavier charge will give greater penetration and less accuracy. It is human nature to add a pinch more of anything that the recipe calls for on the theory that this will improve the flavor or, in this case, the efficiency of the revolver. Believe me, it doesn't. Use 16 grains for maximum accuracy and never more than 25 grains for maximum penetration with round ball, and 12 grains to a maximum of 15 grains with conical projectiles. The diameter of the bullet should be .376. You can cast your own lead with a mould obtainable from any gun shop which handles muzzle loading supplies or you have a choice of moulds for balls, conical bullets and conical bullets with hollow base.

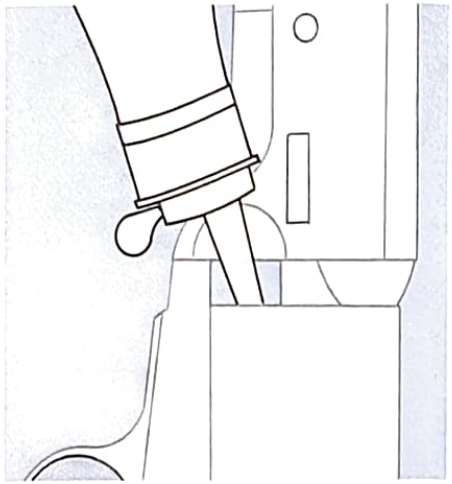
If you want to shoot the easy way, you can buy already cast bullets in different shapes. In order to shoot your 1851 Colt 36 caliber Navy you will need FFFG gunpowder (not smokeless) and a box of No. 11 caps.

Here is how to load your percussion revolver.

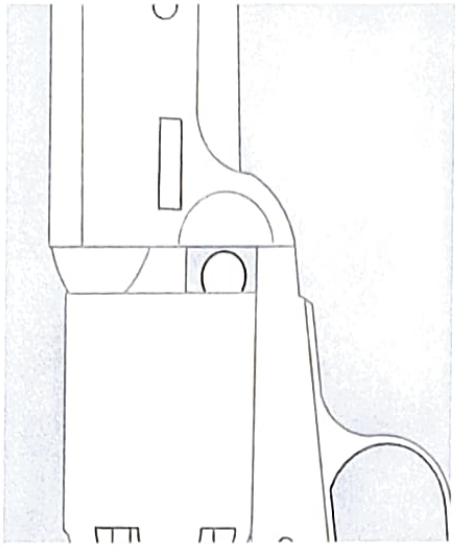
1. First, cock the hammer halfway by pulling it back to half cock. This will allow the cylinder to revolve freely.



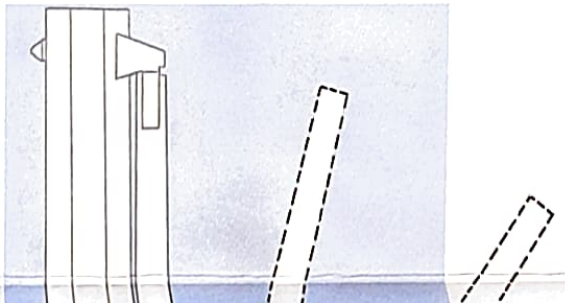
2. Pour a pre-measured charge of powder into one of the chambers.



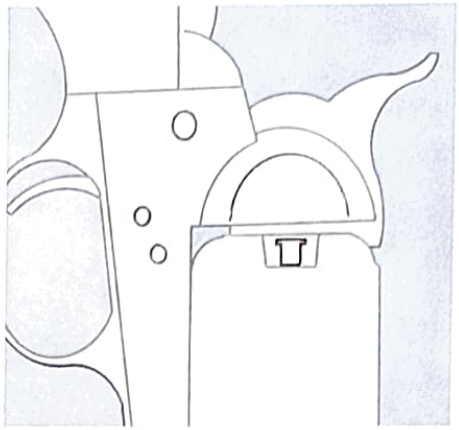
3. Seat the ball with the sprue up, on the mouth of the chamber and rotate the cylinder until it is under the loading lever.



4. Ram the charge home with the loading lever piston (the lever drops down when you retract the spring loaded catch of the ramrod. The catch is located under the muzzle of the barrel.) Repeat the process until five of the six chambers have been loaded.

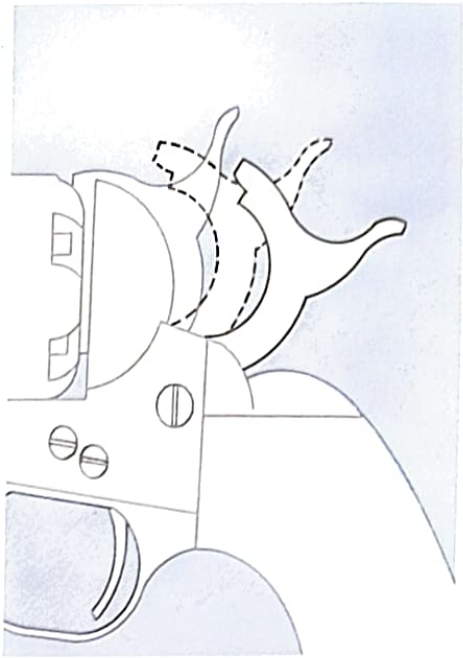


5. Push a percussion cap on each of the five nipples. The hammer can then be lowered carefully on the unprimed nipple and the revolver can be carried safely without fear of discharge. Be sure not to snap the hammer or let the hammer hit the



uncovered nipple with force. This will smash the nipple and close the hole which conveys the flash to the powder in the chamber. If this happens, the deformed nipple must be removed with a special nipple wrench and a new nipple must be screwed in.

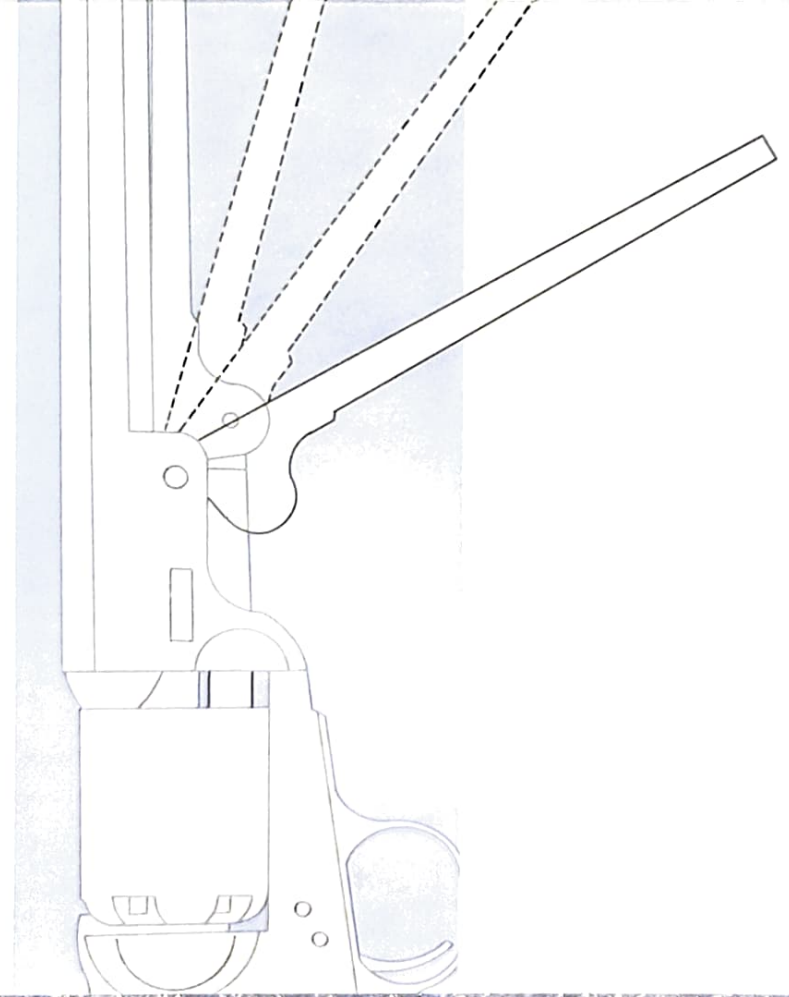
6. When you are ready to shoot, pull the hammer all the way back to full cock, aim the revolver and pull the trigger. You will notice that the



cylinder revolves each time that you cock the hammer. You can shoot as fast as you can cock. By holding the trigger back and hitting the hammer with the cheek of your hand, considerable speed can be obtained at the loss of accuracy. This method of firing is called fanning because of the motion of the hand striking the hammer. While widely used by movie cowboys it is not a recommended procedure of firing as it is dangerous, inaccurate and wasteful of powder and ball.

Specifications

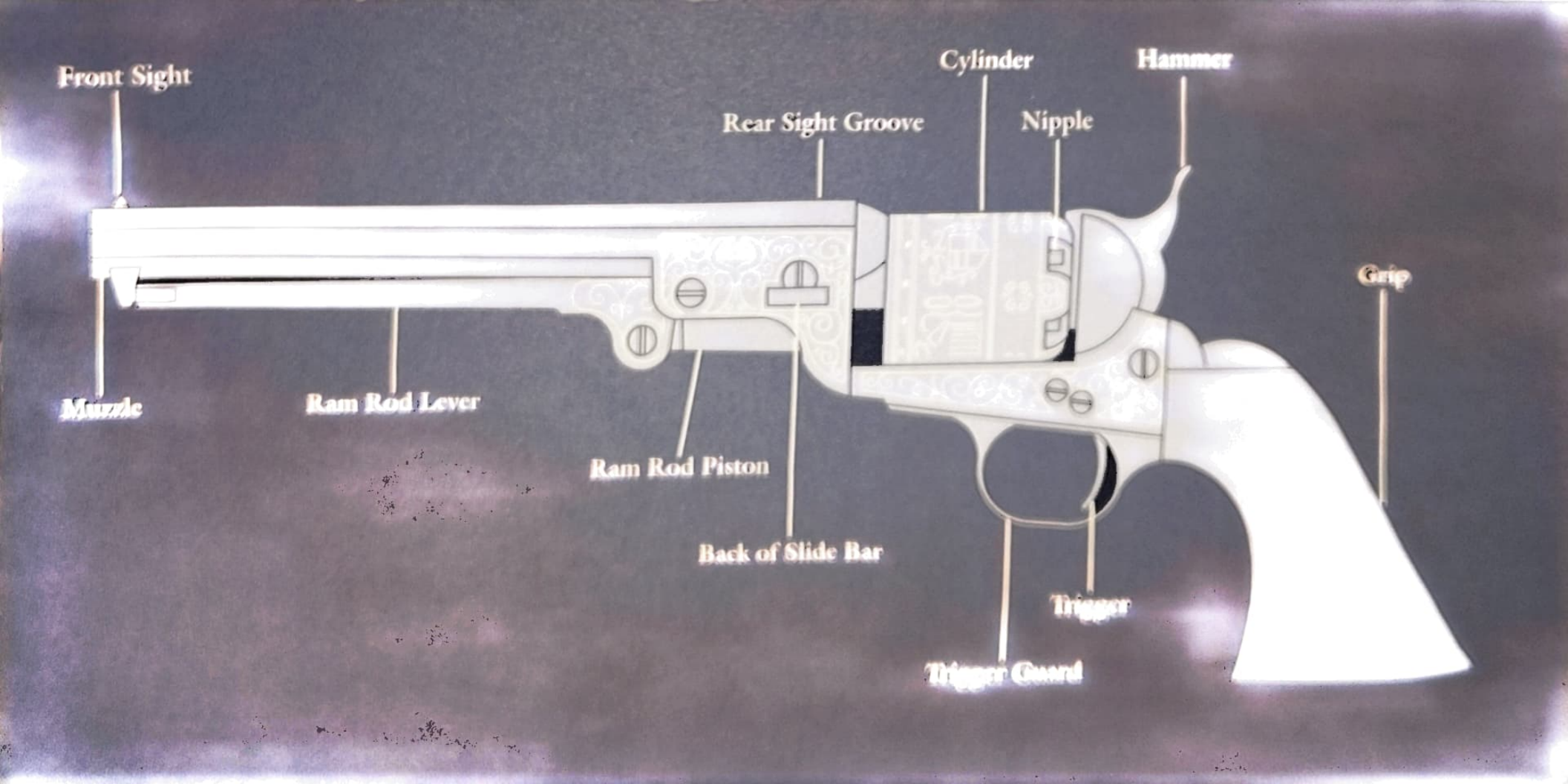
Length: 13 inches
Caliber: .36
Weight: 2 pounds, 9 ounces
Engraving: 24-karat gold
Stock: walnut
Cylinder: six chambers
Frame and Metal Cylinder:
First quality steel, blued
Triggerguard and Backstrip:
Brass, plated 24-karat gold
Percussion Caps: No. 11
Gun Powder: Black powder only



of powder and ball.

Because it is a time consuming chore to load the percussion revolvers, many of the old timers carried a spare cylinder already loaded. They could insert this loaded cylinder by removing the slide bar which retains the barrel and pulling the barrel forward to free the cylinder. The slide bar is located on the left side of the frame ahead of the cylinder and is held in place with a screw.

And don't forget—wear safety glasses whenever you shoot any firearm!


Front Sight
Cylinder
Hammer
Rear Sight Groove
Nipple
Grip
Muzzle
Ram Rod Lever
Ram Rod Piston
Back of Slide Bar
Trigger
Trigger Guard

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